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WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN
ROUNDTABLE REPORT

Canadian Coalition in Support of
Women in Afghanistan

December 2, 1999
Toronto, Ontario

3007.2E

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On December 2, 1999, a group of women traveled from Toronto to Ottawa to have a meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy regarding the human rights catastrophe facing the women of Afghanistan. In the three year period since the Taliban had taken over much of Afghanistan and imposed draconian, health damaging, life-threatening rules on the women and girls of Afghanistan, Canadian women had begun to form groups to speak out for these women, to promote awareness about their plight and to work for change.

Seven women met in Toronto on November 4, 1999 to discuss the need to take the issue forward. The founding group included:

- Sally Armstrong, Chatelaine Magazine
- Carol Dahlquist, the Canadian Unitarian Council
- Bev LeFrancois, Halton Rape Crisis Centre
- Marilou McPhedran, York University
- Margot Franssen, The Body Shop
- Sharifa Sharif, Afghan Women's Solidarity
- Maryham Mahboob, Zarnegaar Newspaper

This group took their concerns to the meeting with Mr. Axworthy on December 2, 1999. At that meeting Mr. Axworthy shared the concerns of the group and made several suggestions.

- To form a national coalition that would unite all the groups speaking for the women of Afghanistan in Canada.
- To create an awareness building campaign across Canada.
- To create a resolution for the International Status of Women meeting in New York, February 2000, get the resolution on the agenda and get it passed.
- Lobby the American government to get the women on the same agenda as bin Laden.
- Hold a national conference.

The Minister said that if those steps were followed he would take the issue to the Security Council when Canada became president of the council on April 1. On March 31, the group filed the following report to the Minister.

FORM A NATIONAL COALITION

The Canadian Coalition in Support of Afghan Women was established February 29, 2000. More than 86 organizations and individuals were contacted. They were advised that a conference call would be arranged in April and a national conference would be held on June 10. To date, 21 organizations said they would send representatives to the conference.

CREATE AN AWARENESS BUILDING CAMPAIGN

The Body Shop has included the women of Afghanistan in their Stop Violence Against Women, 2000 campaign. Apart from the on-going media coverage, several members of the coalition are addressing gatherings in support of the women of Afghanistan at the following rallies:

- An Amnesty International rally in Vancouver May 1.
- The Women for Women Afghanistan Rally in Calgary May 3.
- The Canadian Unitarian Council meeting in Calgary, May 16.
- A conference at the University of California, June 16

GET THE ISSUE ON THE AGENDA AT THE INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN MEETING IN NEW YORK

The resolution was written for the more than 60 Canadian women NGOs at the Consultation of the Feminist Alliance for International Action held on February 11-14. The resolution was passed at that meeting and carried to the meeting in New York. It says,

> BE IT RESOLVED THAT
> Canada must lead the UN Security Council in redressing the oppression of women and girls under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and other countries where women suffer from grievous and systemic violations of women's human rights such as denial of personal autonomy, freedom of movement, right of assembly, access to employment opportunities and basic services such as education and health care.

LOBBY THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT TO GET THE WOMEN ON THE SAME AGENDA AS BIN LADEN

By working with the Feminist Majority in the U.S., we have been assured that they are pressing the U.S. government to include the human rights catastrophe facing the women of Afghanistan in the same agenda as the bin Laden issue. To that end we are attending the Expo 2000 Rally being held by the Feminist Majority in Baltimore on March 31 and April 1and 2 where we will speak on a panel discussion involving human rights and the women of Afghanistan. It is our intention to discuss Canada's role in this issue and Minister Axworthy's support of the National Coalition and his action at the Security Council.

HOLD A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The conference is scheduled for June 10, 2000

CANADIAN COALITION IN SUPPORT OF THE WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN CONFERENCE JUNE 10, 2000

The founding group met weekly to execute the plans for the conference. We applied for a grant of $6,000 from the Security and Peace Building initiative in the Minister's office. As well, Margot Franssen engaged Strategic Objectives to handle the public relations.

The conference was held at Osgoode Hall, York University on June 10. It attracted women from across Canada. As 300 registrations were received by the Tuesday before the conference, we had to advise others that the conference capacity had been reached. Minister Axworthy was unable to attend. Minister of International Co-operation Maria Minna came in his place.

The agenda was as follows:

8:30 Registration
9:00 Coffee, muffins, networking
9:30 Greetings from Marilou McPhedran on behalf of the Centre for Feminist Research, York University
9:35 Sally Armstrong to introduce Federal Cabinet Minister, The Honorable Maria Minna, Minister for International Co-operation
9:40 The Honorable Maria Minna
10:00 Question period with the Minister
10:30 Coffee break
11:00 A viewing of the documentary, Shroud of Silence
11:15 Panel Discussion

- Maryham Mahboob, writer, editor, Afghan Community Newspaper, Zarnegaar. What it's like for women in Kabul City.
- Adeena Niazi, President, Afghan Women's Organization. What it's like for women in the refugee camps.
- Marilou McPhedran, director, International Women's Rights Project. International Law and Women's Rights.

11:40 Discussion
12:15 Lunch – an authentic Afghan meal will be sold for nominal cost – a portion of the proceeds will be donated to the International Development and Refugee Foundation.
1:15 Greetings from Sharifa Sharif, writer, member of Afghan Women's Solidarity
1:30 Town Hall Session

- Janice Eisenhower – Women for Women Afghanistan, Calgary
- Judy Lightwater Women for Women in Afghanistan, Victoria
- Tayiba Nasr – Londoners for Afghanistan's Women, London
- Deb Ellis – Canadians in Support of Afghan Women, Dunville

2:00 Break out session

- How to put pressure on governments that support the Taliban
- How to promote awareness in Canada and around the world
- How to embarrass the Taliban government

- How to help Afghanistan's women today

3:00 Report back to identify Action Plans
3:30 Action Plans
4:00 Farewell speech by Margot Franssen, president, The Body Shop

ACTION PLANS

How to Put Pressure on Governments That Support the Taliban

- Boycott products from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates
- Put pressure on corporations that do business with the offending countries
- Picket the embassies and consulates of those three countries in Canada
- Organize a "walk of shame" between the embassies of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates
- Suggest the Canadian government put moral and economic pressure on these governments
- Start a postcard campaign for Canadians to write to the embassies and consulates and copying their letters to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Addresses to be available on our web site
- Encourage Canadians to write to other like-minded governments such as France and Norway asking them to put pressure on the governments that support the Taliban
- Canadians to contact Muslim leaders and Islamic scholars to request they call on the Taliban and other supporters to stop misinterpreting and distorting Islamic teachings
- Boycott the travel industries of countries that support the Taliban
- Invite Canadians to encourage the nationals of Pakistan, The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to pressure their governments into ending their support of the Taliban
- Pressure The Netherlands to stop buying the "legitimate" drugs from Afghanistan
- A delegation from this coalition should meet with representatives from the consulates and embassies of the three countries that support the Taliban to present petitions and letters from Canadians
- Regularly get the names of countries that support the Taliban into the media
- Find out who is buying into the drug trafficking and the arms sale and stop them
- Link with groups in other countries doing the same work

How to Promote Awareness in Canada and Around the World

- Continue with public events and petitions
- Connect with new groups
- Raise awareness in schools across Canada
- Create a Canadian logo that's easily identified
- Link up with other groups such as Take Back the Night, Gay Pride, White Ribbon
- Let women in Afghanistan and Pakistan know what we're doing here
- Find another name for the Taliban – Talibandits, for example

- Distribute the action plans from the coalition as widely as possible
- Include the issue in as many media outlets as possible including plays, music as well as mainstream media
- Create a blacklist of international corporations involved in Afghanistan
- Piggyback this issue on the World March for Women
- Develop a comprehensive information package including videos, postcards, information updates
- Work with the Canadian government on raising awareness
- Seek service clubs that will carry the message and get involved

How to Embarrass the Taliban

- Ask the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague or the International Criminal Court to indict Mullah Mohammed Omar
- Organize a Peoples War Crimes Tribunal to charge the Taliban under International and Canadian law
- Ask the Foreign Affairs Minister to monitor the Taliban's effort to be recognized by the UN
- Ask the International Olympic Committee to ban Afghanistan from the Olympic Games
- Modify the word Taliban with words such as "the illegal regime" for use in media
- Investigate what Taliban representatives are doing in Canada
- Investigate the countries that support the Taliban war machine, publish their profits and organize a boycott of their products
- Produce posters showing the Taliban as drug traffickers
- Get information about worldwide protests into Afghanistan via the BBC and underground newspapers
- Support the groups working in Afghanistan today – RAWA – for example
- Encourage an Islamic conference to create an international coalition against the Taliban
- Play videos in public places to let the public know how misogynist the regime is
- Pressure the U.S. government for the role they have played in supporting the Taliban

How to Help Women in Afghanistan Today

- Assist in establishing schools: collect books and materials for the elementary schools, high schools and university programs in refugee centres such as Peshawar and Quetta
- Start micro credit projects
- Purchase computers so the universities can have access to the Internet
- Raise scholarship money for refugee students
- Fund clinics in Afghanistan through the Red Cross
- Start income-generating projects
- Help existing schools in refugee camps
- Help medical clinics in refugee camps
- Increase opportunities for Afghan women to immigrate to Canada and elsewhere

- Arrange support for Afghan women once they get to Canada
- Raise money for school supplies, medical supplies
- Build the national coalition – use the web site, flyers, a button
- Send Canadians to assist in the refugee camps; bring professionals from the camps for training here in Canada
- Train rape crisis counsellors
- Call on corporations to donate goods to be sent to the women

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